

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Case File No.: AA-79856

EA No.: AK-040-99-039

Type of
Action:

Mining Claim Occupancy

Location:

T. 14 S., R. 75 W., Sections 35 and 36, SM

Applicant:

Hanson Industries
15102 East Indiana Avenue
Spokane, WA 99216

Prepared By:

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Preparing
Office:

Bureau of Land Management
Anchorage Field Office
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Date:

September 13, 1999

I. INTRODUCTION

On August 27, 1996, Hanson Industries filed with this office a notification of an existing occupancy on a Federal mining claim. Additionally, on June 8, 1998, an occupancy worksheet was submitted to BLM.

Hanson Properties holds over 100 unpatented Federal mining claims on the Salmon River drainage, near the village of Platinum, Alaska. The property is connected to the village by approximately 8 miles of narrow gravel road.

The mining operation has been mostly inactive in recent years. Hanson Industries has not filed an Alaska Placer Mining Application since 1994, but has maintained a caretaker to watch over the camp and equipment. Equipment stored on the property includes a 1937 Yuba bucket-line-dredge, a 1989 Clay Miner wash-plant, a 1952 200 W dragline, and a 1937 37B dragline. Equipment stored within buildings on the property includes a large assortment of bulldozers, front-end-loaders, trucks, graders, and generators. There is also 30,000 gallons storage capacity in lined fuel containment tanks. A gate is maintained to control summer access to the camp.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

Hanson Industries has requested an occupancy authorization for continuing use and occupancy in order to conduct ongoing gold placer mining activities on their Federal mining claims.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plan:

The proposed mining claim occupancy is within lands included in the Southwest Planning Area MFP, signed November 1981. One of the plan objectives (objective M-2), states that the Bureau provide opportunities for the development of locatable minerals throughout the planning area to meet the national demands for precious and strategic minerals. The Proposed Action is in conformance with this land use plan objective.

C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policies, Plans or Other Environmental Analyses:

The regulations for authorizing occupancies on Federal mining claims are established in 43 CFR 3715. As established by regulation, the NEPA analysis for mining claim occupancy authorization is considered separately from the 3809 Surface Management Regulations which considers mining impacts.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action:

The Proposed Action is to continue the mining claim use and occupancy of existing structures for Hanson Industries and/or a caretaker, in order for them to conduct placer mining activities on their Federal mining claims located at the Platinum Mine Camp. The camp was a company town that once had a population of over 200. In recent years only a caretaker has resided on the property, although the current caretaker is a local who resides in the village of Platinum. A caretaker is considered necessary to protect the structures and extensive stored equipment from theft and/or vandalism.

The occupancy site consists of approximately 10 acres of cleared and leveled land containing approximately 30 structures which are in a condition ranging from good to poor. Former crew housing consists of wood and stucco construction. The administrative buildings, rec-hall and mess-hall are wood frame construction. The shop and maintenance structures are a combination of steel/concrete/wood construction. Most of the structures are over 50 years old. There is no proposal to build new structures on the mining claims. In order for the Hanson Industries to continue the use and occupancy of the structures on their Federal mining claims, BLM must issue an occupancy authorization. The structures are within Sections 35 and 36, T. 14 S., R. 75 W, Seward Meridian.

Human and kitchen waste drains into septic systems.

Access can be achieved by landing a small to medium aircraft on a 2,000 foot gravel airstrip located on the claims approximately ½ mile from the structures. Access can also be achieved by landing at the village of Platinum and driving approximately 8 miles along a well maintained gravel road. Wintertime access can be achieved by snow-machine from Platinum or Goodnews Bay.

The proposed duration for the occupancy would be full time, although present use is only part-time.

B. No Action Alternative:

The only alternative is the No Action Alternative. Under this alternative the BLM would not authorize the proposed occupancy.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements:

There would be no impacts to the following critical elements: Air Quality; ACECs; Environmental Justice; Farmlands; Floodplains; Invasive, Non-native

Species; Native American Religious Concerns; Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species; Wetlands/Riparian Zones; Wild and Scenic Rivers; Subsistence; or Wilderness.

1. Cultural:

Most of the structures were constructed in the 1930's, by the Goodnews Bay Mining Company for mining purposes. The cabins have never been formally evaluated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

2. Subsistence:

No change in Federal Subsistence Management Program authority or implementation would occur from the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action will not significantly restrict subsistence uses, decrease the abundance of subsistence resources, alter the distribution of resources, or limit subsistence user access from currently existing conditions.

A gate was relocated a few years ago to allow access for subsistence use. The local natives have reported that they use the area to hunt squirrels for their fur.

B. Vegetation:

The vegetation consists mainly of low willow, fireweed and various grasses. There are no trees in the area. Most of the land adjacent to the cabins consists of tailings and settling ponds from past and present mining. The surrounding uplands are composed of undisturbed grasses and low brush. Most of the surrounding drainages have been subject to placer mining in the past.

C. Wildlife:

Wildlife in the area includes moose, caribou, black and brown bears, wolves, and various birds and small mammals. Regional wildlife densities are fairly low.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

Since use in recent years has primarily consisted of maintaining a caretaker on the property, impacts have been minimal. The present caretaker is a local who resides in the village of Platinum, from which he makes frequent trips to the property to check its status. However, past and potential future caretakers have resided in the camp. Employees of the Hanson Industries head office do occasionally visit and stay in the camp. When individuals do stay in the camp there would be impacts to water quality from the production of grey water through kitchen and household activities. Grey water is usually disposed of through pipes leading to a sump pit where it would migrate down, merge, and be quickly diluted by the local groundwater.

Minor amounts of solid household and human waste would be produced when the camp is occupied. Household waste would consist primarily of kitchen waste. Minor amounts of household hazardous waste would be generated, primarily from the use of household cleaners and solvents. Septic tanks would be used to deal with human waste.

Brush in the immediate vicinity of the structures would be cleared and the existing structures maintained. Structures create an elevated need for wild-land fire protection for the area. The existence of structures usually results in a designation of a full suppression level of fire management in the local fire protection management plan.

The presence of food or improperly disposed garbage will occasionally attract bears. Every once in a while a bear must be shot if it stays around and becomes a potential hazard. Some of the local miners will harvest a moose in the fall for subsistence purposes.

There is approximately 10 acres of lost habitat, principally impacting small mammals and birds, created by the occupancy. Additionally, the noise and activity associated with the occupancy will tend to cause many wildlife species to avoid the site and relocate to other areas. However, there is no shortage of similar habitat in the region for impacted species to relocate to.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

The principal impact of not authorizing the requested mining claim occupancy is there would be no Hanson Industries occupancy on their Federal mining claims. Because of the remoteness of this location, mining is unlikely without a mining claim occupancy authorization. Additional impacts would be that brush in the immediate vicinity of the structures would not be cleared and the existing structures would not be maintained.

C. Cumulative Impacts:

There would be no cumulative impacts of the occupancy to local resources.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. List of Preparers:

Carl Persson, Geologist (Certified Mineral Examiner #035)
Jeff Denton, Subsistence Coordinator
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Donna Redding, Archeologist
Dave Kelley, 3809 Surface Management Coordinator